



Schools Forum

Date: 15 September 2022

Time: 8.30 am

Venue: Via MS Teams

Item/Paper

A

Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 30 JUNE 2022 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS

Present

School Forum Members

- Bill Dowell (Chair)
- Caroline Clode – association secretaries
- John Hitchings – Academy governor
- Marilyn Hunt – Primary headteacher
- Shelly Hurdley – Early Years Representative
- Sian Lines – Diocese of Hereford
- Georgia Moss – Academy (MAT) representative
- James Pearson - TMBSS
- Michael Revell – Primary governor
- Mark Rogers – Primary headteacher
- Andrew Smith – Post 16
- James Staniforth – Post 16
- Brian Thomas – Special Academy headteacher
- Carla Whelan – Primary academy headteacher

Members

Kirstie Hurst-Knight

Officers

- David Shaw
- Karen Levell
- Jo Jones
- Stephen Waters
- Phil Wilson
- Helen Woodbridge
- Neville Ward

Observers

- Nick Bardsley
- Roger Evans

The chair welcomed all to the meeting.

<p>1.</p>	<p>Apologies Apologies had been received from Gwilym Butler, Sandra Holloway, Sue Lovecy, John Parr, Stephen Matthews, and James Staniforth had advised of partial attendance.</p> <p>Late apologies were received from David O’Toole and David Vasmer (observer)</p>	<p>ACTION</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising The minutes were agreed as a true record.</p> <p>The F40 slides had been circulated to Schools Forum members.</p> <p>Discussions are being undertaken with special schools and AP providers regarding the supplementary grant allocations.</p> <p>James Staniforth had investigated with the sixth form association as to whether increased high needs funding should be passed on and they had confirmed that this is expected. David Shaw, Karen Levell, and James Staniforth are to discuss this further.</p>	<p>DS/KL/JS</p>

The constitution will be amended regarding the Union reference.

PW

It was confirmed that a review is underway around the effectiveness of the Graduated Support Pathway (GSP) and this could be picked up later in the meeting.

Regarding the profile of Early Years and funding, Neville Ward advised of DfE increases to hourly rates adding that most has been passed on to providers. (The funding retained had been put into Early Years SEND.) He added that the Early Years Alliance have begun a campaign for early years as educators

Air cleaning units. Kirstie Hurst-Knight had advised that she had picked this up with Public Health and information had been circulated to schools.

3. **Updated Schools Grant 2022-23**

Jo Jones presented the report which provided an update.

Shropshire's 2022-23 DSG allocation was updated in March 2022 to include recoupment for academies and deductions for high needs places funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Schools Block deduction relates to the 62 mainstream academies who receive funding directly from the ESFA.

High Needs Block deduction relates to place funding in the pre and post 16 sector including special academies, mainstream academies, further education, and independent learning providers directly funded by the ESFA.

4. **School Balances as at March 2022**

Jo Jones presented the report for maintained sector schools.

The report confirmed that overall balances had increased by 14% and Jo Jones explained the details.

The chair cautioned that although this presented a generally positive picture of school funding, it may not be so.

Mark Rogers explained that the lockdown period had been unusual. Some activities had to be cut meaning there were one-off surpluses. Now there are significant extra costs relating to getting back to normality. It is an intense time in schools and there are pressures including a lack of supply staff. It is expected that schools will need to use some of their surpluses this year.

Phil Wilson added that three year budget plans are less encouraging in years two and three. He advised that the schools supplementary grant will be embedded into the Schools Block going forward but may not meet the increased costs.

Carla Whelan highlighted the significant increase in SEND needs.

5. **Growth Fund Allocations**

Phil Wilson presented the report which was for information.

2021-22 Growth Fund

- Allocation of £959,993, of which £438,187 was originally set aside for

distribution to schools requiring growth to meet basic need – balance of £521,806 was earmarked to part fund transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block to meet pressures on the latter

- Total of £236,000 was distributed to 6 schools in 2021-22 – balance of £202,187 was used to offset the overall overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant at the year end.

2022-23 Growth Fund

- Allocation of £910,113, of which School Forum agreed a sum of £544,045 to be earmarked to part fund the transfer of 0.5% - £949,076 - from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block to meet pressures on the latter, leaving a balance of £366,068 for distribution to schools this year.
- 2 primary schools (of which one is an academy) and 2 secondary academies will be receiving support from September 2022, while 2 secondary academies will be receiving funding for the summer term having received funding in 2021-22 – a total committed cost of £246,000 in 2022-23.
- Pre-opening costs for the new mainstream primary school in west Shrewsbury, slipped to September 2023, will be charged to the Growth Fund – total estimate is £180,000 (£100,000 in 2022-23 and £80,000 in 2023-24).

6. **Implementing the Direct National Funding Formula**

Phil Wilson presented the report and supporting paper.

He advised that the implementation is likely to be in 2024/25 and the closing date for responses to the consultation is 9 September 2022.

He plans to liaise with the f40 group on this and encouraged Forum members to consider the consultation questions and respond to him by 8 July. He undertook to share responses with all Forum members.

James Staniforth asked if there were any downsides for Shropshire. Phil Wilson advised of the need to interrogate further to establish this. He added that a School Place Planning Review is planned for 2023 -2038 from Autumn and the LA will now need to notify the Secretary of State re where there is growth. This will then be weaved into the funding formula.

James Staniforth's reflection on Post 16 national funding is that any sense of planning has disappeared. There is now more consistency over the country with a reactivity to numbers.

Phil Wilson clarified that the key basis is the October Census with forecasts for housing. There is a need for improved information to the DfE with the SCAP return now including special and alternative provision.

Mark Rogers advised that he is in favour of the NFF but highlighted the need to ensure that smaller schools are sustainable which Phil Wilson endorsed, including not losing sight of schools with surplus places.

7. **Dedicated School Grant Monitoring 2021-22**

Stephen Waters presented the paper

Central School Services Block

The 2021-22 outturn position for the DSG is a £1.452m in-year surplus. This surplus needs to be added to the £0.870m DSG deficit carried forward from 2020-21 resulting in a cumulative DSG surplus of £0.582m to be carried forward into 2022-23.

Early Years Block

Underspend of £0.093m on a provisional budget of £16.592m. The final Early Years DSG allocation for 2021-22 is published later in the year. The main reason for this is an underspend of £0.427m identified in relation to the Early Years allocations for three and four year old nursery entitlement. This is due to a decreased level of take up of free entitlement places from eligible parents. £0.174m overspend on SEN Support. The demand experienced on this budget has grown in recent years, and particularly sharply in 2021-22.

£0.109m overspend on deprivation payments and sustainability payments. Sustainability funding is used to 'top-up' the amount of per pupil funding paid to providers in more rural areas to ensure that they have enough overall income to continue to operate. The overspend can be attributed to pandemic recovery with a few settings taking time to get numbers back up to sustainable levels. Early Years budget position is provisional. It is anticipated that the small underspend will change to an overspend for 2021-22 once the final Early Years DSG allocation is published.

Neville Ward explained the importance of the outcome of the January census. This is likely to result in a reduction to the 2021/22 budget.

He mentioned the increased spend (on a small number of settings/schools) in sustainability payments.

Marilyn Hunt advised the importance of the sustainability payments (especially in rural schools/settings) which needs to be considered at a policy making level. Neville Ward suggested that as more schools are being supported it will need to be considered at initial budget setting.

High Needs Block

Stephen Waters explained that this block accounts for the majority of the in-year surplus. He and Karen Levell confirmed a general increase in demand which is a national trend. The independent special schools' budget was overspent despite an increase in the budget of £1m. It is hoped that the opening of the new free special SEMH school, Keystone Academy, (specialising in neuro-diversity) in September may have an impact on this. It will provide 50 places from September 2022 rising to 150 by 2024.

The Post 16 FE High Needs Block variances were considered.

Stephen Waters explained that this is the largest area of underspend as there had been a decrease in expenditure rather than the expected increase.

Karen Levell added that there was an unexpected trend and she couldn't predict if it will be ongoing. She added that there are a number of Post 16 annual reviews to complete and more students are moving towards the independent school sector/new alternative provision.

The chair advised that as some variations were substantial, he wanted Forum to get a feel for what are going on.

James Staniforth advised that Shrewsbury Colleges Group is largest provider in the county and the picture fits with their situation. The colleges have had to

turn down applications as do not have level of specialist support required. David Shaw cautioned that whilst there is currently a projected underspend, there are some issues about the impact of the timeliness of reviews. A clearer picture will emerge in the Autumn term. The LA is aiming to meet statutory deadlines around phase transfers in the future.

Stephen Waters confirmed that the provision for phased transfers is not included.

Andrew Smith added that it would be useful to continue the dialogue and work together to deliver best outcomes for students in the most economical way. Karen Levell advised of continuing increases in requests for support. There has also been a growth in hubs attached to mainstream schools.

Central School Services Block

An in-year overspend was incurred of £0.142m. £0.111m of this occurred as the result of one-off budget monitoring pressures reported under Ongoing Duties as per line 1.5. in the Appendix. This covers “Asset Management” and contributions to “Central Support Services.

Schools Growth Fund

Expenditure of £0.236m in 2021-22 against the Growth fund of £0.438m resulting in a £0.202m underspend. This is effectively carried forward in to 2022-23 as part of the overall £0.582m DSG surplus carried forward

Accounting for the DSG Deficit

DSG position has moved from a revised deficit carried forward of £0.870m to a cumulative DSG surplus of £0.582m as at the end of the 2021-22. The Council has met the Department for Education’s requirement to reduce or manage down the deficit as soon as possible

Achieved as a result of less growth in expenditure in 2021-22 compared to growth in High Needs Block DSG allocation in 2021-22 rather than any strategic reductions to High Needs Block DSG expenditure itself

Work is required to understand the growth required in 2022-23 and beyond.

The impact of the pandemic on SEND children needs to be considered.

A small proportion of high-cost, low incident cases can disproportionately impact the High Needs Block DSG financial position.

Mark Rogers suggested that school colleagues may be confused by the picture. Schools are better off than we thought - need has increased but not as much as was expected. The number of children with complex needs is concerning and providing challenge to schools and settings. It is positive about Keystone Academy but we may need even more places.

Marilyn Hunt asked if the DfE have acknowledged that deficit has been addressed. Stephen Waters advised that they hadn’t made contact yet.

Brian Thomas referred back to the 4.6% on the top up funding asking if it is attributed to the delay with annual reviews. Karen Levell thought that it may well be. David Shaw added that may also be accounting differences which need clarification. There are increasing numbers of pupils coming through and the LA will be providing more information about this.

David Shaw shared a map re transport which is an example from the new system which will enable placement choices to be considered. Work will start in Autumn on school place planning aligned to the Shropshire local plan. The new school will hopefully reduce transport needs.

The move to independent special schools may be due to underperforming local special schools.

Brian Thomas echoed this and advised that it is impacting on Post 16 placements too.

The chair asked for paper on this for September meeting.

DS/KL

8. **Communications**

Phil Wilson advised that f40 continue to lobby. He shared their concerns regarding funding although they recognised that there had been some improvements. He undertook to share the communication with Schools Forum.

Kirstie Hurst-Knight reported that Shropshire Council were top in first preference secondary placements (and third in primary placements). She acknowledged the work done by the Admissions team.

Kirstie Hurst-Knight advised that she has boxes of free resources from National Association of Funeral Directors on grief and bereavement support. Schools should contact her if they require these.

The chair commented that it was a shame that Amber had not been able to join.

Wished everyone a relaxing summer holiday.

9. **Future meeting dates:**

Thursday 15 September 2022
Thursday 3 November 2022
Thursday 1 December 2022
Thursday 12 January 2023
Thursday 26 January 2023 (Provisional)
Thursday 16 March 2023
Thursday 15 June 2023

The meeting closed at 10.11 am